

Remembering Private Charlo

© 2008 Jack W. Gladstone

Through the valley of the Bitterroot, September 1805
Two US captains funneled their command
Soldiers ragged, cold and hungry, as they prepared to stand
Before Coyotes people, children of the land.

The native heart was open sharing ponies and white robes
Landlocked Argonauts proclaimed their trek's intention
To secure a newborn nation allies and new trade.
The quest for land was not addressed or even mentioned

Seventeen stars rose proudly over the valley
Chief Three Eagles welcomed strangers in their home
Speaking "Friendship lasts forever, through suffering and joy
In our home you'll never be alone..."

Awakened corporations, furs were first in line
Disembodied dreams of Eden ended
Guns, disease and whiskey, a crucifix of steel
Would precede demands for land from those befriended

Summer 1855 U.S. reps arrived
To manage concentration of the tribes
Political convenience, promises in session
Were broken by a pen of dispossession

Forty-four stars hung silent over the valley
Chief Charlo was driven from his home
From open arms to refugees, in less than a century
The focus of the heart was then unknown...

By the summer of 1942 fascism smothered the globe
Coyote's people had kept alive their stories, around the fire told
The great grandson of Charlo sat spellbound by his dad
As the Mission Range turned to snow

The call of a warrior is first answered in the light
And later reaffirmed when awakened in the night
In November 1943 Louis Charlo dropped down to one knee
And pleaded for his mother's consent to enlist at seventeen

He said "my deepest wish is to be a Marine
I promise to return just wait and see
Our people will be proud of me
Our struggle will be won over Hitler and the Rising Sun"

Boot camp at Pendleton, M-1's and submachine guns
K-bars, SOB Instructors drill to alchemy
Reps at Camp Tarawa, Parkers Ranch, Hawaii
There's no retreat, no defeat, we're United States Marines!

Conditioned every way, day after day
To fight an enemy that we may never see
We've bonded into fire teams, squads and platoons
conspicuously coined "Easy Company"

On the USS Missoula pushing toward a rendezvous with the blue
Maybe sky, maybe ocean, maybe a typhoon of glowing steel
The crosswinds of eternity are gusting through the portals of my destiny

I wonder if the Japanese have thoughts like these
Perhaps they carry photographs from home
Must I suffocate all empathy for the enemy in war
Towards the rock entrenched defenders on the shore
We must paralyze compassion for the enemy in war...

February 19th 1945 Japanese Territory
Through sheets of withering fire, Marines assaulted the island fortress of Iwo Jima
2400 casualties in the first 24 hours
By sundown of the fourth day, Mt. Suribachi loomed as a smoldering mystery
At sunup, four Marines were chosen to scout its summit
On this team was Private Louis Charlo of the Bitterroot Salish Nation

Four native born Americans summited the island
Defiant to the winds of history
Louis, in a note to his parents on the Flathead Reservation wrote:
"I was involved in the fracas atop Suribachi"

Two hours later, the first flag, off the USS Missoula, was raised
Five and a half hours after that, it was replaced by a larger flag
forever immortalized by "The Photograph"

To the American public "The Photograph" portrayed a battle practically won
But for the Japanese and Marine gladiators, the battle had only begun
For well over a month, it raged, 24 hours a day, as numb warriors dueled in Hell

On March 2nd, in a sector coined "MeatGrinder"
Private Ed McLaughlin, of Boy's Town, Nebraska was hit, severely wounded
Louis Charlo rushed to his side, and while attempting to carry him to safety
both were killed by machine gun fire...

Charlo, in the hereditary line of Salish chiefs
dating back to Lewis and Clark
Louis Charlo, who pleaded for his parent's consent
for early enlistment to serve the nations he loved
Private Charlo, who with three other US Marines
became the 1st foreign soldiers ever to stand triumphant
over Japanese Territory
Private Louis Charlo was 19 years old...

Forty-eight stars bowed proudly over the valley
As Three Eagles sang Charlo's spirit home
Brother. son. and warrior. a hero. and a friend
In our heart you'll never be alone